Innovative Heritage Quay opens its doors

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The university was awarded £1,585,000 by the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) to develop a new archives centre that will be one of the most technologically advanced in the UK. It will be fully open to members of the public, so that they can delve into its varied collections. There will also be a high-tech Exploration Space, enabling visitors to sample archival material via touch screens and gesture technology.

The new archive occupies a level of the university's 14-storey Central Services Building. Adjacent to the historic Huddersfield Narrow Canal, it is to be known as Heritage Quay and will be opened on 20 October by Gary Verity, Chair of HLF, Yorkshire and the Humber.

[quote=Gary Verity, Chair of HLF Yorkshire and the Humber]Heritage Quay is set to become the key to heritage research...[/quote]

Sport, music, politics, industry and the performing arts are among the many topics covered by the University's archives. In addition to its public spaces and facilities for researchers, Heritage Quay will also house a repository that contains more than one-and-a-half kilometres of shelving, to accommodate more than 300,000 books, documents, photographs, recordings and videos.

The repository will be one of the first in the UK to meet a rigorous new British Standard covering security and fire suppression. A programme of digitisation will preserve fragile material, enabling it to be accessed electronically (on the web as well as on site) There is also a future-proofing dimension, as obsolete formats such as Betamax video recordings are upgraded.

Public outreach will be a major part of Heritage Quay's activities and the archives team will have significantly increased capacity in working with local communities, including a new post working with local schools. Local organisations – including Huddersfield Local History Society and its Civic Society - will also be using the facilities. One of the most important collections is the official archive of the Rugby Football League and there is a plan to mount displays covering whichever team is visiting town to play the Huddersfield Giants during the Super League season.

"The university and its partners have some outstanding archive collections" said Professor Tim Thornton, Pro Vice-Chancellor, Learning and Teaching. "As well as offering some very innovative technology which will allow those remarkable holdings of the collection to come to life for visitors, whether they simply want to drop by, to browse deeper, or to carry out detailed researches, I'm particularly excited by the way Heritage Quay will be focussed on bringing new groups of people into an active engagement with the archives in new ways."

Gary Verity, Chair of HLF, Yorkshire and the Humber, said: "We have been delighted to support this project that will make widely available a treasure trove of information and detail on so many subjects of national and international significance. The archive's range is breathtaking covering not only social, cultural, political and industrial history but also music, the arts and sport. It is no exaggeration to say that Heritage Quay is set to become the key to heritage research and education for the region and beyond."

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